14. Ideocracy and Systemic Apotheosis

The spectacle proved the most brilliant of any that I have witnessed, for the whole city had been decked with garlands of flowers and laurel and adorned with richly coloured stuffs and it was ablaze with torches and burning incense; the citizens, wearing white robes and radiant countenances, uttered many shouts of good omen; the soldiers, too, stood out conspicuous in their armour as they moved about like participants in some holiday procession, and finally, we were walking about in state. The crowd chafed in its eagerness to see him and to hear him say something, as if he had been somehow changed by his good fortune.\footnote{Cassius Dio on the Accession of Septimius Severus}

(Cassius Dio on the Accession of Septimius Severus)

14.1 Legitimacy

Due to the structure and nature of a totalist ideocracy, the means of achieving legitimacy and the very nature of legitimacy must be understood somewhat differently in comparison to pluralist polities. Indeed, for a totalist ideocracy, the necessity and ability to achieve perfect legitimacy is derived out of its monopoly on truth. Since the ideology understands its truth and values to be perfect, absolute, and imperative, consensus and harmony must also be total in nature. Consequently, at least nominally, no imperfection is acceptable, and thus, by extension, no contestation or dissent, which may taint the great ideocratic project. The complex debate around the core concept of legitimacy has been approached from a multitude of positions, foremost of which are also the classical perspectives such as Weber’s authority triad and Carl Schmitt’s own vision of legality.\footnote{See Carl Schmitt, \textit{Legality and Legitimacy}, trans. and ed. Jeffrey Seitzer (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004).} Whereas the concept itself has at times been contested, one can broadly understand political legitimacy as the degree in which a polity is measured in rightfully exercising supreme political power.\footnote{See Bruce Gilley, “The Determinants of State Legitimacy: Results for 72 Countries”, \textit{International Political Science Review/Revue internationale de science politique}, 27/1 (2006): 47-71.}

As it has been shown, for the totalistic mindset, the presence and implicit peril of an impure enemy can herald the apparent corruption and disintegration of a society. As a result, the usual responses against crises are thought of as no longer relevant or ineffective in addressing the seemingly insurmountable obstacles plaguing the community. This is often a self-fulfilling prophecy if the crisis takes place in a society with low institutional development or where the institutions themselves are seen as not intervening effectively, or are paralysed by political infighting or other social disturbances. Faced with such a scenario, the totalist heterodoxy will see itself as the pinnacle of a virtuous community, whose task is to restore moral order and to (re)establish “truth” and “order”. This mission can be achieved in several ways.

Firstly, it is by eliminating the impure from any position of influence, ensuring that those who are perceived as the fiercest opponents of the movement are removed from

positions which they could use to influence events in their favour. Secondly, the restoration of truth ideally implies a total domination of the state apparatus, which will be, to some extent, considered as “compromised” due to its failure to suppress the impure, its resistance before the claims of the movement or, not in the least, its perceived undermining of a community’s historical destiny. Thirdly, once complete domination has been achieved, the work can begin in earnest on the implementation of the movement’s doctrinal principles. This can be best achieved through control of education, communication systems, and the attempted transformation of the legal-economic status quo.

One other, and perhaps most important piece of the legitimization strategy encountered, is the creation of a series of symbolically-charged narratives whose goal is to perpetuate a totalist ideocracy. This system is thus legitimized through complex performances of its systemic qualities, which ultimately represent the externalisation of its soteriological-simplifying principle. One encounters such aspects first and foremost in totalist ideocracies, but they are naturally common to premodern ideocratic polities, such as the Roman Empire. In the latter case, the perpetuation of the ideocracy was legitimized to a large extent by its use of ritual in approaching community and destiny. Ultimately, the existence of several cyclical rites enabled the periodical reconstitution of an idealised-homogenous community, its acceptance of the existing ideological hegemony, and its “consensus” towards the established order.

 Whereas in societies with a powerful institutional tradition legitimacy is more often concentrated in the office of the legislative or in the office of the elected leader, more authoritarian states invest far greater amounts of time and effort in the charismatized figurehead at their helm. Indeed, as Bertelli states, the more autocratic the nature of the state, the more does the ruler require both visibility and what ultimately amounts to a charismatized physical presence. The importance of visibility is thus paramount, along with all the corresponding rituals, spectacles and theatrical dimensions of power.

 The visibility and legitimization of a totalist ideocracy is based on several elements which enhance its spectacular nature and the interconnectedness of actors, audience, and stage in what one may call a veritable systemic apotheosis of the ideocratic polity. As seen already, spatiality can function as an appropriate setting with a deep symbolic and psychological resonance for the participants, including architectural complexes or geographical areas of great significance. To this, one can add the (ideally) submissive masses whose – often purposefully exaggerated – acquiescence of the regime’s dimension of power is necessary. Lastly, the key element in the legitimization for all totalist ideocracies lies in the object of charismatization, whether it is the epistemarch, a guiding law, or a simulacrum of the ideocratic polity itself.

 Legitimacy is thus linked to a combination of cohesion, ritual and acquiescence. This is particularly important in modern totalist ideocracies which have managed to progress beyond the early phases of internal expansion and which have, either through hybridisation or through a “totalitarian” phase, achieved some of their grand objectives. By reaching this stage

947 This does not mean the hegemony is simply a product of the ruling class. All classes and individuals are part of a system and contribute to its legitimacy, and thus to its continued existence through every action they undertake except that of resistance, especially resistance is violent in nature.
948 Clifford Ando, *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire*, 77.
950 To an extent, these ultimately seem to bridge rather than widen the gap between the *Christomimèsis* of the premodern monarch and the aura of the charismatic demagogue, between the imperial *imago* and the more modern political *icons* featured on posters and ostentatiously cherished by the populace, between *old* and *new* rituals of power, all of which strive to be *ancient.*